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SUBJECT: Thousands of Argentines Learn about U.S. Electoral Process through Embassy Election Events

Ref: BUENOS AIR 00001544

Summary

¶1. Intense Argentine interest in the U.S. election provided post with an opportunity to enhance relations with important contacts, numerous schools, and the media. Post reached over 10 million Argentines through media coverage of our election events -- the widest and most positive media coverage generated by the Mission in recent memory. The Mission also carried out 43 presentations on the elections throughout Argentina, reaching thousands of (mostly young) Argentines, as well as generating additional favorable press coverage. END SUMMARY.

2,000+- Argentines Participated in Election Presentations

¶2. Over two thousand Argentines throughout the country participated in Mission-provided presentations on the U.S elections. Twenty-three FSO and specialist volunteers provided 43 presentations on U.S. elections at 14 universities, 21 high schools, three NGOs, and four bi-national centers, as well as a presentation to 22 Argentine congressional representatives who were to observe the elections in the States. Because the effort was exceptionally successful, post plans to continue public outreach through discussions of the transition process, as well as other topics of interest relating to our society.

¶3. Post also sponsored a mock debate at the University of Belgrano in Buenos Aires. Two students, who were chosen by their classmates as candidates, played the roles of Obama and McCain. The entire class was involved, either as officials of the respective parties or as active town hall participants. The students enjoyed the debate, and the young man who played McCain (gestures and all) said that although he had previously been pro-Obama, he was now more sympathetic to McCain's views. Minds opened, and the class learned a great deal about the U.S. electoral process.

Four Hundred Argentines Enjoy Speaker Program

¶4. Post hosted five highly-engaging speaker programs involving visiting U.S. experts. Professor Carol Darr of George Washington University spoke in person on "The Impact of the Internet on the US Elections." Post also hosted four DVCs: on "Impact of Presidential Elections in the US Foreign Policy," "Influence of the Hispanic Vote in the US Presidential Elections," "Presidential Candidates' Platforms," and "An Update on the US Elections."

Legislators Observing Elections Hosted by Ambassador Wayne

¶5. Ambassador Wayne hosted 23 Argentine officials, including several members of Congress, who were traveling to the U.S. to observe the U.S. elections on October 30. During the morning

event hosted at his residence, Mission's IO provided an overview (with the aid of the IIP PowerPoint) on the presidential campaign and electoral process. Mission's POLCOUNS also provided an election presentation to members of this group before their departure.

Embassy Election Project Targets Largest Mass Audience

¶16. Post sponsored a TV Co-op on Elections with Argentina's top television station. From October 27 through November 5, Channel 13/Todo Noticias (TN) anchor and international columnist Andres Repetto aired numerous interviews, stand-ups, live feeds, and news flashes as part of his TV Co-op program on the U.S. elections from Washington, D.C., Florida (Orlando and Miami), and Illinois (Chicago). Countless broadcasts went out on open-air Channel 13's prime-time national news program, Telenoche (#1 in Argentina, with an audience of over 2 million) and on the 24-hour cable news network Todo Noticias (TN). In-depth and thorough coverage of the Obama and McCain final rallies, minute-by-minute developments on election night, and commentary live from Senator Obama's victory speech aired November 5.

¶17. Mr. Repetto maintained an excellent daily journal in his personal blog, which carried his experiences on the last days of the campaign trail, his impressions and references to the TV Coop program. Not only did thousands of people visit the blog, but cable network TN also advertised it on the air.

Election Night Event Reaches 10 Million Argentines

¶18. U.S. Embassy's election night party (ref BUENOS AIR 00001544)

BUENOS AIR 00001547 002 OF 002

attracted the widest and most positive media coverage of any Embassy event held in Argentina in recent memory. Hosted by the Embassy at the American Club of Buenos Aires on the evening of November 4 and morning of November 5, the celebration of democracy at its best included a mock vote by Argentine citizens, remarks by the CDA, a mock debate by (well-informed Argentine graduate students posing as) Obama and McCain, and a contest to guess the outcome of elections in battleground states and the total number of electoral votes garnered by the winning candidate. The impact in Argentine television, radio, Internet, and press media was considerable, allowing us to transmit a message of optimism about American democracy and the future of the bilateral relationship to an estimated 10 million Argentines. One radio station broadcast an interview with the CDA that reached 600 stations throughout the hemisphere. TV interviews with the CDA and other Mission personnel continued to air all over the country for days afterward, including a thirty-minute program on the Embassy event that aired on an open-air TV channel last weekend.

¶19. In addition, an op-ed piece by Ambassador Wayne was placed in Clarin, the largest circulation Spanish-language paper in the hemisphere, on November 5, and the CDA gave four consecutive radio interviews the same morning.

IRC Weekly Election Alert

¶110. Starting in August, the IRC produced a weekly alert on the elections with links to news, polls, analysis, and documents from a variety of sources, including IIP, think tanks, polling organizations, and political experts. The alerts included materials on the electoral process, party platforms and conventions, the candidates and their positions on different issues, transcripts of debates, and the campaign and the media, among other topics. The alerts were distributed to 1,745 Embassy contacts.

Comment

¶11. The U.S. elections provided Embassy Buenos Aires with many valuable opportunities to reach numerous audiences with information about one of the pillars of our democracy: our electoral process. The linkages made with schools, NGOs, and the Argentine public will be important as we continue public outreach on other topics of interest, including the transition period. We have begun a dialog with many new organizations and contacts that post can build on in the future, as we mobilize our entire Mission staff to contribute to our top Mission goal -- increasing understanding of and sympathy for the United States in Argentina. The enormous and positive media coverage on our nation's compelling presidential election has helped contribute to an enhanced U.S. image here in Argentina. We intend to maintain the pace of our effort to keep this positive public diplomacy momentum going.

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